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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: USOAS AMBASSADOR'S MEETING ON LATIN AMERICA

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: In his July 29 meeting in Madrid with Spanish MFA Director General Sandomingo, USOAS Ambassador Maisto urged Spain to send observers to the Venezuelan referendum and to remain firm on Cuba. Maisto thanked the GOS for its decision to send police/troops to Haiti with a Moroccan contingent. End summary.

Haiti

2. (C) Sandomingo told Maisto the GOS had not yet determined the exact composition of its joint participation with Morocco in Haiti. Morocco's likely contribution would be more in the form of troops, while Spain's would be Spanish National Police, Guardia Civil and some force protection elements from the military (press reports the Spanish Marines might participate), Sandomingo said the total numbers of the contingent would be some 200-240, but details were still being worked out with the government of Morocco. Maisto expressed USG appreciation for the Haiti contribution, noting it had been well regarded in Washington. He and Sandomingo noted the significance of the cooperation with Morocco, just several years after the Perejil Island dispute between Spain and Morocco. Sandomingo also emphasized the importance of Spain's cooperation with an Islamic country. Maisto also noted the importance of Brazil's contribution and leadership role, and the multilateral nature of the effort, including the UN, OAS, U.S., Canada, the Latin Americans and countries like Spain and Morocco.

Venezuela

3. (C) Maisto expressed disappointment at the failure of the EU to mount an observer mission for the Venezuelan referendum. Sandomingo acknowledged this was a huge disaster and failure for the EU commission, whose practices are far too slow, rigid and bureaucratic. Maisto asked if Spain would consider sending observers on a bilateral basis. Sandomingo indicated Spain did not have the time nor the resources to send a bilateral observer mission, but was considering sending a group as part of the OAS observer mission. He said Spain's participation would be in the form of technical experts rather than political officials. Maisto strongly encouraged Spain to send a technical team, noting that presence of technical experts was equally or in fact more important than that of political figures. Experts who could detect fraud in voting machine operations, vote count tallies and the like were very much needed, Maisto added.

4. (C) Maisto expressed concern about such problems as the integrity of the voting process, including voter intimidation; efforts to pack the Supreme Court and the integrity of the electoral tribunal; voting registry anomalies, including the 1.1 million new names on the electoral registry; efforts to change the precincts or polling locations of some one million people; the process of issuance of citizenship cards; and untested touch-screen voting technology. Sandomingo agreed with Maisto on the importance of the presence of international observers. Sandomingo said that if the international observers could not verify the outcome, the referendum results would have no value. He said that even Chavez probably understood this. Maisto stressed that U.S. policy on Venezuela was completely bipartisan, and this includes the Congress. Maisto underscored that U.S. policy in Latin America in general -- including on Cuba and other issues -- is strongly bipartisan.

Cuba

5. (C) Maisto asked about Spanish policy in Cuba since the release of the 15 political prisoners, including the dissident Marta Beatriz. Maisto said that while the release was a good gesture, it was reminiscent of the Soviet style of repression, followed by token release of prisoners and demand for some sort of reward or recognition. On the release, Sandomingo noted the positive EU statement, which also expressed desire for further steps by Havana.

6. (C) Sandomingo said that the GOS had some ideas of steps in the medium term. The GOS would like to regain some semblance of normal access to Cuban officials, which their Ambassador in Havana currently does not have -- the fault of

Havana, not Madrid, Sandomingo acknowledged. One idea the GOS was pursuing within the EU (which several other EU members share) is to terminate EU policy of inviting Cuban dissidents to the national days of EU member states. This practice has been anathema to the Cuban government, which objects to the symbolism of dissident presence at national day celebrations, and to the simultaneous presence of the dissidents with Cuban government officials. Sandomingo added that many Cuban officials spurn contact with the dissidents because they fear some of the dissidents may be double agents for their own security service. Sandomingo said that as part of this proposal, the GOS would propose a broader and more meaningful EU program of outreach and dialogue with the dissidents, which he said Havana would find easier to accept.

Havana might then lift the ban on contacts with Spanish and other diplomats, which refuses such access in large part because of the national day reception policy. The EU and its members are paying a very high price for the policy that far outweighs the benefits the dissidents receive by attending the national day receptions. Currently, Spain and other governments are prohibited from having contacts even with lower-level Cuban officials who might play a role in any future Cuban government.

17. (C) Sandomingo also said the GOS was "considering" for the medium term (no decisions made) re-opening the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana. Sandomingo expressed his view that this would not necessarily be seen as an opening to the Castro regime, as Havana despised the Spanish cultural center because it feared the center, which welcomed all segments of Cuban society. Maisto asked Sandomingo to keep the USG informed as these ideas progressed. He said he had never heard the argument that the Cuban government feared the mix of dissidents with government officials at the national day receptions, nor Sandomingo's concept of the Cuban view of the cultural center.

#### Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE)

18. (C) Maisto thanked Sandomingo for Spain's active role in CICTE, especially in Costa Rica, and asked for Spanish support in the CICTE project on "Cooperation and Legal Assistance Development," particularly in the area of coordination and structural development. Sandomingo was positive and said Spain likely would offer support. He noted the importance of the terrorism issue for Spain and the importance in Latin America of prominent U.S.-Spain cooperation.

#### Dominican Republic

19. (C) Maisto noted that USTR Zoellick was signing today an FTA with the Dominican Republic as an important step in helping to stem deterioration there. Both agreed the situation was of concern, particularly in the economic area.  
MANZANARES